

Carver

2 July 1964

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam

1. The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFL -- or, in French, FNL) is a Hanoi-created and Hanoi-directed political mechanism devised to facilitate Hanoi's campaign to acquire control of South Vietnam.
2. Throughout its forty-year struggle for political mastery of Vietnam and hegemony over all of Indochina, Ho Chi Minh's Indochinese Communist Party has displayed a protean variety of organizational forms and made extensive, effective use of various "front" devices. During World War II and the immediate post-war period, Ho operated through the medium of the Viet Minh League (League for Vietnamese Independence), dissolved and replaced in 1946 by the Lien Viet (or Vietnam United Front), which in 1954 gave way to the Fatherland Front. The object of all these fronts -- and of the NFL -- has been to conceal the fact of Communist control of the revolutionary struggles they conducted, to usurp the banners of all indigenous political causes supported by non-Communist Vietnamese nationalists, and to deceive gullible or ignorant foreigners, particularly non-Communist liberals.
3. In 1954, after Dien Bien Phu and Geneva, Hanoi (along with many Western capitals) expected South Vietnam to disintegrate politically and fall inevitably under Hanoi's dominion. When it became apparent that this was not going to happen, Hanoi (in 1957) initiated a small scale program of insurrectionary subversion to give the inevitable course of history a helping hand. In 1958, Hanoi realized that attainment of its goal would require stepping up the pace of its insurgent campaign. A naked Communist grab for power directed from North Vietnam, however, risked generating more domestic and foreign opposition than Hanoi cared to excite. By September 1960, Hanoi had devised the outlines of a new front organization to facilitate insurgency in South Vietnam. (The general plans and shape for such a front were announced by Le Duan in the September 1960 Lao Dong Party Congress in Hanoi.) The abortive non-Communist coup of November 1960 made Hanoi decide to speed up its timetable and in December 1960 Hanoi ordered the Viet Cong to announce the establishment of the NFL.

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4. The NFL claims to be an indigenous (i.e., South Vietnamese) grouping of patriotic nationalists of diverse political persuasions. The "vanguard" of the Front is admitted to be the Peoples Revolutionary Party (i.e., South Vietnamese Communist Party) -- created in late 1961 to direct the NFL -- but the front claims not to be Communist per se. This, of course, is pure political myth. At every echelon the Front is controlled either directly from Hanoi or by Lao Dong Party cadre in South Vietnam (many of whom are ethnically of Southern origin). The Front's avowed purpose is to provide a "nationalist" alternative to the Saigon government which could, in time, peaceably negotiate "reunification" with Hanoi -- i.e., a calming way-station on the road to Lao Dong Party control over all of Vietnam.

5. The NFL claims to represent every spectrum of South Vietnamese political and social life and, though Hanoi and Moscow sponsorship, has engaged in a wide round of international activities. (It maintains permanent representations in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Algeria, Indonesia and Egypt and its "delegates" are active participants in a plethora of Communist-sponsored international conferences.) Actually, the NFL as such has little following in South Vietnam. Few South Vietnamese are fooled by its pretensions or by the Viet Cong's claim that its forces are fighting in the NFL's cause rather than vice versa. The South Vietnamese who support the Viet Cong generally realize that it is the Communists with whom they are working and little credence is given to the NFL's claim to separate political identity or status.

6. Abroad, the situation is somewhat more complex, particularly in France. A number of French writers, journalists and intellectuals seem to have taken the NFL's avowed political credentials more or less at face value and supported its claim to be a grouping of South Vietnamese nationalists. In recent months, the French Government seems to have adopted this line, at least as a propaganda theme, and we have considered indications that through various official and unofficial channels Paris is currently endeavoring to publicize this view.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Far East Staff
Office of National Estimates

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